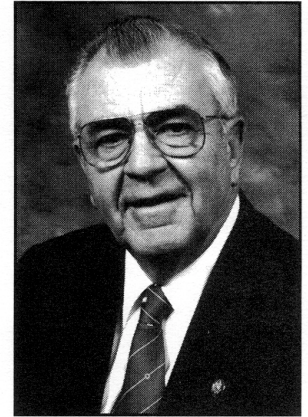


Congressman Herbert H. Bateman *AMERICA'S FIRST DISTRICT — VIRGINIA* **News**



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OPENING STATEMENT
THE HONORABLE HERBERT BATEMAN
CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY READINESS

This afternoon, the Subcommittee on Military Readiness is meeting to better understand the readiness concerns of the Navy and the Marine Corps as they relate to the continued use of the Atlantic Fleet Training Facility, Vieques, Puerto Rico.

What has brought our attention to this issue was the unfortunate training accident in April of this year that resulted in the death of a Navy contract employee at the training center. Following the fatality at the Vieques range, Navy Secretary Danzig directed a cessation of the use of all live fire and inert ordnance at Vieques until an investigation could be conducted. In addition, following the April incident, protesters have permanently occupied the live impact area.

Although the initial Navy investigation and study of the continued use of Vieques was completed several months ago, the President directed the Secretary of Defense to also look at this issue and provide a report. We are still waiting for the release of this latest study. In the meantime, the use of Vieques by Navy and Marine Corps Atlantic Fleet units remains prohibited.

The purpose of today's hearing is focused on the readiness impact of the unavailability of the Vieques training ranges to the Atlantic Fleet Naval and Marine Corps units. I am keenly aware there are many other policy questions involved in this issue; but I would like to stay focused today on the military readiness aspect of this issue.

My primary concern is the readiness of our fighting forces. I am aware that one of the last carrier battle groups that utilized the facilities at Vieques deployed to support the Kosovo operations and were flying combat missions within hours of arriving on station. Adequate training is the cornerstone to military readiness. If the final decision is to close Vieques, I am very concerned about where the Atlantic Fleet will be able to conduct live fire, coordinated training, and at what cost. I would hope that there can be some agreement between the Navy and the residents of Vieques that would address both of their concerns.

(MORE)

For our first panel today, we will hear from:

Vice Admiral William J. Fallon
Commander, 2nd Fleet
U.S. Navy

Lieutenant General Peter Pace
Commander, U.S. Marine Forces, Atlantic
U.S. Marine Corps

Rear Admiral John Johnson
Commander, Carrier Group Six
U.S. Navy

Rear Admiral Cutler Dawson
Former Commander, Cruiser Destroyer Group 12
U.S. Navy

Brigadier General Emo Gardner
Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff for Aviation
U.S. Marine Corps

On our second panel, we will hear from:

Honorable Carlos A. Romero-Barcelo
Resident Commissioner of Puerto Rico

We invited the Governor of Puerto Rico, the Honorable Pedro Rossello, but unfortunately his schedule precluded his appearance here today.

Before we begin, I would like to yield to the Ranking Member of the subcommittee, the Honorable Solomon Ortiz, for any comments he may have.

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